

VZCZCXRO0253
RR RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHGI RUEHJS RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW
RUEHROV
DE RUEHJI #0047/01 0321657
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 011657Z FEB 09
FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1146
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 8227

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000047

SIPDIS

RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPT FOR NEA/ARP; ECA,
ECA/A/E, ECA/A/E/NEA; OES; CA/OCS/ACS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [TPHY](#) [KPAO](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: HIGHER EDUCATION TAKING A LEAP FORWARD IN SAUDI
ARABIA WITH 60-70 AMERICAN GRADUATE STUDENTS REGISTERED FOR
STUDY AT KING ABDULLAH UNIVERSITY FOR SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY (KAUST) NEAR JEDDAH

REF: 07 JEDDAH 0481

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In early January the King Abdullah
University for Science and Technology (KAUST), slated to open
in September 2009, held an on-site pre-orientation in Jeddah
for 320 students including 60-70 from the U.S. and
approximately 100 students from Saudi Arabia. Virtually all
students will receive full scholarships and generous stipends
at a graduate university designed to offer a liberal social
environment in a country known for its highly restrictive
social, cultural and religious atmosphere. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) A GLIMPSE AT JEDDAH FOR INCOMING STUDENTS: A
pre-orientation event for incoming KAUST students was held in
Jeddah January 4-11. The program consisted of informational
sessions about all aspects of the university, opportunities
for students to mingle, attend student-faculty advising
sessions, and featured tours of the KAUST campus and downtown
Jeddah. The program including all travel for students was
fully funded. KAUST even paid air fares and hotels for
parents of prospective students to join a pre-departure
orientation session in the U.S.

13. (U) According to credible sources, there will be somewhere
between 320 and 400 international students when KAUST opens
in September 2009 with approximately 100 Saudi nationals.
Students apply to the program during their sophomore or
junior year of undergraduate study in order to be accepted
into the master's degree program at KAUST. Virtually all
students admitted receive full tuition and a stipend for
their time at KAUST as well as for their remaining years of
undergraduate study following acceptance.

14. (SBU) 60-70 US STUDENTS TO ATTEND KAUST: 60-70 American
students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are
currently enrolled at KAUST. This may be the first large
cohort of American graduate students ever to engage in formal
degree study at a university in Saudi Arabia for an extended
period of time. The students have been recruited through the
Institute of International Education (IIE), attracted by the
promise of free tuition and generous stipends,
state-of-the-art research facilities and funding to match,
along with such perks as Cleveland Clinic health care amid an
overall atmosphere of largesse.

15. (SBU) CULTURAL AWARENESS NOT A PRIORITY: Poloff spoke
with several American students attending the orientation.
Some complained mildly about being minimally informed about
the traditional culture, religion, and society of Saudi
Arabia and indicated that they thought KAUST might not have
been 100% forthright about the restrictive local environment.
One American student explained that study at KAUST is a

tremendous deal all around and noted that interest is developing among the students in attempting to understand and explore Saudi society to the extent allowed.

¶16. (SBU) DEFYING LOCAL DRESS CODE: Students took an organized tour of historic downtown Jeddah. Female students were not advised to wear the traditional abaya (black cloaklike garment) over their clothes -- in defiance of local custom and practice accepted as required for women, Middle Eastern and Western, going about in public in Saudi Arabia. Downtown Jeddah is considered one of the more conservative areas in the city where the Muttawa (morality police) are known to congregate.

¶17. (SBU) LIBERAL CAMPUS LIFE: KAUST's intent is to create at the isolated campus, one hour north of Jeddah, a haven for co-educational pursuits, including two cinemas, sports clubs, restaurants, shopping centers and even a marina. International schools following several foreign curricular models will be built for the children of KAUST students and faculty. All students and faculty, including Saudi nationals, are provided with on-campus family housing, but are free to leave the campus at will. Women students are supposed to have the right to drive on the campus, similar to the arrangement at the ARAMCO compound in Eastern Saudi Arabia.

¶18. (SBU) VILLAGE REDEVELOPMENT: KAUST is located west of the small, underdeveloped, rural Saudi village of Thuwwal. KAUST officials announced that they have a plan for the sustainable development of the village. The plan depicts a revitalized Thuwwal to include high-end restaurants and commercial space. Likely the village will be leveled or renovated to create a picturesque "Williamsburg" environment for KAUST residents,

JEDDAH 00000047 002 OF 002

perhaps displacing the indigenous community.

¶19. (SBU) MEETING SEPTEMBER 2009 DEADLINE: KAUST employs 32,000 workers round-the-clock to make certain that the facilities are completed since the King has been assured of a September 2009 on-time opening. The student audience were told that the development is on schedule with construction happening at a pace far exceeding the normal time-line in the Kingdom.

¶10. (SBU) WHAT KAUST MEANS FOR SAUDI ARABIA: KAUST has established linkages with several other universities, in particular with Effat College (now Effat University), a local private women's institution named for the esteemed late wife of King Faisal. However, with the majority of KAUST students and faculty non-Saudis, there is no immediate plan to change the demographic mix or to "Saudi-ize" the university. Officials commented that KAUST's mission for the Kingdom is to produce landmark research that will boost Saudi productivity with an emphasis on energy technology. The university is intended to portray Saudi Arabia to the outside world as a modern center for advanced scientific discovery and innovation.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT. With the aim of attracting foreign scientific and technological talent to Saudi Arabia, KAUST is setting social norms designed to be far more relaxed and liberal than at other institutions of higher education in the Kingdom. Conveying an understanding of Saudi conservative custom, culture and society does not appear to be a KAUST priority. Post will monitor the experience of 60-70 American students during academic year 2009-10 as a factor in determining the feasibility of establishing a U.S. Student Fulbright program in Saudi Arabia. END COMMENT.
QUINN